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ABSTRACT

This report presents some statistics that reveal how students with disabilities appear to be faring and identifies some strategies that appear to result in desirable outcomes. Data were obtained from national studies and surveys from 1985 through 1998. Inclusion in typical education, training, and community experiences results in better transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. Research also shows that school based learning experiences are essential to successful transitions. (SLD)

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Brief discussions of critical issues in Urban Education

On Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities

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Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities

Since 1983, the successful transition of youth with disabilities from secondary schools to work, post secondary education, and adult roles, has been a major national policy initiative. In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated the provision of transition services for youth with disabilities at age 16 or younger if appropriate. The purpose of this Act was to intensify the efforts of public education agencies to prepare students with disabilities for productive employment and full community participation.

One way to evaluate the effectiveness of transition services for students with disabilities is to take a look at the outcomes students are achieving. The purpose of this report is to present some important statistics that reveal how students with disabilities appear to be faring; to identify some strategies that appear to result in desirable outcomes; and to suggest some resources for further information about this topic.

What measurable outcomes are students with disabilities achieving, and how do they compare with youth in the general population?

The following outcome data was obtained from national studies and surveys conducted from 1985 through 1998. Our review of this outcome data reveals that:

Students with disabilities are more likely to drop out of high school than youth in the general population.

More than one-third (36%) of all youth with disabilities served in publicly mandated special education programs drop out of high school prior to graduation. This represents a significantly higher drop out rate than the national average of 12%. A higher percentage of students with disabilities in urban schools (36.6%) drop out of high school than their peers in suburban areas (24%) and rural schools (31.4%).

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Students with disabilities in urban areas are more likely to be exposed to risk factors associated with school failure.

It is widely recognized that poverty may place youth at greater risk of poor school performance. A recent study indicated that 47% of youth with disabilities lived in households with an annual income of less than 12 thousand dollars. Family structure and parent education levels are important predictors of student success. Research indicates that only 10 to 25% of urban students with disabilities live in two parent households, and 22% of parents had not completed high school.

Students with disabilities are less likely to be included in regular education classrooms.

Outcome data indicates that the average time spent for urban secondary students in regular education classrooms was 41%, compared to 56% for suburban students, and 59% for rural students.

Even when they graduate from high school, students with disabilities are less likely to attend any type of post secondary school.

Three to five years after graduating from high school, only 37% of youth with disabilities had ever attended any kind of post secondary school, compared with 68% of high school graduates in the general population.

Students with disabilities are less likely to be employed than non-disabled peers.

Nearly one in five youth with disabilities was not employed and not looking for work three to five years after exiting high school. A 1992 survey of 13 million working-age people in the U.S. revealed that only 34% of adults with disabilities worked full or part time, compared to 79% of adults without disabilities.

High school graduates are significantly more likely to be employed than peers who either drop out or age out of school.

The employment rates for high school graduates was nearly double that of non-graduates. Sixty-five percent of high school graduates with disabilities were employed 3 to 5 years out of high school compared to 37% of students of students with disabilities who had not graduated from high school.

White youth with disabilities are more likely to be employed than peers from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Sixty-one percent of white youth with disabilities were employed 3 to five years after secondary school, compared with peers who were African-American (47%) and Hispanic (50%). African American youth have made the greatest gains in employment. Previous outcome data suggest that these same youth were nearly twice as likely to be employed in 1990, as they were in 1987.

Overall, youth with disabilities are earning wages comparable to non-college youth of similar age in the general population.

The median wages of employed youth with disabilities increased by 43% from 1987 to 1990, more than keeping pace with inflation, and comparing favorably with wages earned by non-disabled peers. However, because of the lower overall educational achievement of students with disabilities, in the future, a wage gap can be expected to develop between wage earners with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. It is important to note that African-American youth did not experience the wage gains achieved by their white and Hispanic peers.

Youth with disabilities are achieving lower levels of independent living than youth in the general population.

The percentage of youth with disabilities achieving some form of independent living within 5 years after leaving secondary school was 37%, compared with 60% of youth in the general population. White youth were significantly more likely to be living independently than African-American youth with disabilities, 42% vs. 26%.

Many youth with disabilities experience significant social isolation and, as adults, this situation is likely to worsen.

Overall, 6% percent of youth with disabilities report significant levels of social isolation. However, among students with multiple disabilities and other health impairments, up to 25% of students report significant social isolation. Among adults with disabilities, only 69% of adults with disabilities reported regularly socializing with friends, compared with 86% of the general population. Thirty-three percent of students reported going out once a week, compared with 55% of the general population.

What have we learned about successful transition services for youth with disabilities?

Our review of the outcome data suggest that although youth with disabilities have made some significant gains in the past decade or so, they still lag behind their non-disabled peers in some significant achievements. Moreover, if these trends continue, we can expect to see these achievement gaps widen in the future. These outcome studies suggest that:

Inclusion in typical education, training and community experiences results in improved transition outcomes.

A prominent theme of transition initiatives nationwide is the inclusion of all students in typical educational and training programs. Outcome studies suggest that for those students who were able to complete high school, inclusion in regular

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classes was related to a higher probability of competitive employment, higher earnings, and enrollment in post secondary education and training.

Increased effort and resources should be focused on the successful transition of minority students.

Outcome studies suggest that minority students have made significant gains in education and employment during the past decade. However, minority students with disabilities, particularly African-American students, continue to lag behind white students with disabilities on many outcome measures.

School-based learning experiences are essential to successful transition.

School based learning experiences such as career awareness, exploration and counseling services, help students to identify their interests, goals, and career majors. These learning experiences should be started at the earliest possible age, but no later than the seventh grade. They include regularly scheduled evaluation for determining the learning needs of students.

Sources:

The National Longitudinal Transition Study, SRI International (1987,1990)
The National Association of Industry-Education Cooperation (1992)
The National Council of Chief State School Officers (1995)
National Organization on Disability/Harris Survey (1998)
U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Annual Report to Congress, (1996, 1999)

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Notes

Some resources for learning more
about transition services for youth with disabilities:
National Transition Alliance for Youth with Disabilities
California School to Work Initiative

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